



How professional services firms are harnessing **digital technologies** to transform their operations

- Arif Mohamed

A lot has been written about how businesses are transforming the customer experience through new technologies. But how about their internal processes, particularly when it comes to professional services firms?

One thing is for certain: from mobile and cloud-based ERP to Big Data analytics, businesses are spoilt for choice when it comes to disruptive digital technologies.

There is, however, a difference between having disruptive technologies and actually benefiting from their full potential, says IDC analyst Anders Elbak.

“For companies to better leverage digital technologies to optimise business processes, enhance the customer experience and develop new digital products, the IT service delivery model needs to change to be more business-oriented,” says Anders.

He goes on to explain, “For an IT organisation to adapt to this change, it is essential to establish an architecture which is geared towards third platform technologies; shift focus from building, buying and integrating solutions to managing and orchestrating multiple-source IT services; and restructure the organisation to ensure optimal business IT alignment.”

This view is shared by Paul Farrell, IBM Global Business Services leader in the UK and Ireland, who argues that - for organisations facing an era of unprecedented change - being good at what you've always been good at is no longer enough to succeed.

"Restless, technology-driven innovation is absolutely critical. CIOs need to be at the forefront of defining and leading this change. To be an innovator you have to be disruptive. You have to be prepared to reinvent your business model and internal processes before someone else beats you to it," Farrell says.

The firm has been working with Wimbledon to achieve this. "Each year, over the course of the Wimbledon Championships, 3.2 million data points are captured, with an accuracy target of 100% and a sub-second response time. That's a serious amount of data. Highly-trained analysts capture the data, and then, in a matter of seconds, this information is available on TV, social channels and millions of digital devices around the world."

For example, Capgemini is using next-generation Big Data platforms to help a media agency develop new and improved analytical tools and techniques. "The goal of this transformation will be the ability to access a wide variety of data sources, to create new value added information to support targeting for their clients," says Evans.

The team is also working with a medium-sized technical consultancy, which adopted cloud-based collaboration and workflow tools to enable better access to information, and improve business processes as it looks towards international expansion.

In another case, CapGemini recently worked with a multinational accountancy business that transitioned to a next-generation cloud-based collaboration platform, enabling it to migrate from a legacy Lotus Notes environment to a mobile one. "The main benefit of this



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Farrell concludes, "While many recoil in the face of technological advances, Wimbledon - working with IBM since 1990 - has embraced it wholeheartedly, through continuous innovation and transformation of its own internal operations."

Capgemini is another consultancy that shares this view. Dr Cliff Evans, Global CTO Digital, VP, says that all professional services providers can benefit from implementing the latest technologies.

"This can be anything from cloud and mobile, big data analytics and social collaboration which all have one thing in common - usage has the ability to transform internal business operations leading to wider efficiency gains".

transformation was to deliver better access to information for the global workforce, while also improving collaboration among employees," says Evans.

Another company supporting businesses with cloud based transformations is Deltek. Neil Davidson, vice president of enterprise, at the ERP software company firmly believes that growth and cloud technologies are intrinsically linked.

"In an industry such as professional services, where knowledge and skills are the core commodities and competition is fierce, it is essential that a cloud infrastructure provides value to both your clients and the bottom line.

The firms that get it right are those that strike a balance between people, process and technology; all working seamlessly together and ensuring user adoption. Professional service firms need a backbone that is inherently robust yet drives efficiencies and agility to respond to clients and the market. It shouldn't be whether companies should move to the cloud but rather, when and how a cloud solution will best support digital transformation and growth".

As well as using disruptive technologies to make data access, financial and project management more efficient, they can also help to streamline traditional processes such as sales and marketing.

Emma McGuigan, Managing Director at Accenture Technology UKI, explains how the firm did this for a large telecoms services firm, which recognised it needed to fundamentally transform the way it sold.

The business embarked on a cloud-based sales and marketing transformation, and chose to deploy Salesforce'

transform internal processes in the future.

Among these are industrialised, business-wide analytics that can mine data lakes in order to help improve internal processes; autonomic, self-managing and healing platforms that can deliver on a 'build once, deploy anywhere' approach; and augmented and virtual reality as a means to reshape internal workflows and processes.

But in order to innovate and stay ahead, it may take trial and error, notes Harry Gaskell, Chief Innovation Officer UK and Ireland at EY (formerly Ernst & Young).

He says, "We live or die on our ability to innovate. A professional services firm has to be able to offer its clients the latest thinking and the best approaches to solving today's problems. Traditionally we've done this by asking our



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software-as-a-service suite. McGuigan explains that the objective of the transformation project was to drive increased revenues through greater share of wallet; increased customer focus, with accounts as the core growth vehicle; and transition from historically core products to next-generation services.

McGuigan says, "Some key benefits emerging from the programme so far include significant cost savings through improving sales' time; a decrease in the product portfolio which has driven more accuracy in deals; and consolidation of multiple reports to a just a few key dashboards, reducing manual admin and support efforts."

Stephen Mercer, Partner, Technology Consulting Lead at Deloitte, observes, "In a business climate being driven by powerful digital forces, disruption and rapid-fire innovation, every company is now a technology company."

In Deloitte's 2016 Tech Trends report, the firm identifies a number of disruptive IT technologies that will help to

people to come up with new insights and novel approaches to delivering client assignments. We would then take the ideas that occurred at one point in our network and rapidly build them into our methods or knowledgebase, so as to make them available to clients all over the world."

"But with the exponential development of new digital technologies, the traditional approach can't keep up with the pace of change. Now we practice 'open' innovation. We work with a network of start-up companies, clients and academic institutions to turn new technologies into practical solutions to real problems. We experiment with solutions, most of which don't work and are rapidly discarded."

"But the ones that survive have enormous potential to change our clients, or perhaps, occasionally, to change an entire industry." Such is the power of disruptive digital technologies.■